



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### U.S. TO HEAD INTERNATIONAL WETLANDS EFFORT

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan said today that John F. Turner, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been named chairman of the standing committee of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

The United States was elected to chair the seven-member international committee at a conference of the group's 60 parties held in Montreaux, Switzerland, June 27 - July 4.

"This selection is an honor for the United States, and reflects the recognition that other countries give President Bush and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as world leaders in wetlands conservation," Lujan said in making the announcement. This is the first time the United States has headed the standing committee.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner pledged to sustain that leadership role through his 3-year term as chairman. He added that working on conservation of wetlands in developing countries would be one of the group's top priorities. "Many of these countries do not have the luxury of setting aside

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reserves or parks in important wetlands because of the need to feed and care for local communities," he said. "We want to assist them with programs which enable traditional uses of fishing, timbering, hunting, and agriculture to continue and yet protect the integrity and productivity of the wetlands for future generations."

At last week's meeting, representatives from the 60 party nations and 30 additional countries gathered to discuss threats to wetlands resources and possible impacts of global change, establish monitoring programs, designate wetlands of international importance, and establish a wetlands conservation fund to assist developing countries that want to conserve wetlands.

The Convention, known as the Ramsar Convention after its first meeting in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, is dedicated to stemming the global loss of wetlands by sharing technologies and developing guidelines for the wise use of wetlands. The Convention also designates wetlands of international importance around the world as a means of increasing public awareness of wetland values. Designation also encourages wetland protection in those countries which have few protective laws or regulations. To date, over 400 wetlands have been designated globally.

Wetlands in the United States designated under the Convention are Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada; the Chesapeake Bay Estuary System, Maryland and Virginia; Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, Kansas; Everglades National Park, Florida; Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey; Izembek National Wildlife and State Game Refuge, Alaska; Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia and Florida; and Cacha, Lower White Rivers Joint Venture Area, Arkansas.

The standing committee directs the Convention's policy, budget, and work program. The committee provides technical guidance, and assists in administering the Convention's international conservation wetlands fund. The fund is composed of voluntary contributions and helps finance training and other needs of the member nations. Countries selected to serve on the seven-member committee in addition to the United States are Pakistan, New Zealand, Poland, the Netherlands, Venezuela, Australia, and Tunisia. The Standing Committee will hold its next meeting in October in Slimbridge, England. The next full Conference of the Parties is scheduled for 1992 in Japan.